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The Price of the Potter's Field

AMONG the symbols of the Lenten season, one of the best known has been largely neglected through subsequent centuries. It is not strange that this has been the case. For twenty Christian centuries the universal reaction to the thirty pieces of silver has been one of revulsion and shame. They have become the very symbol of treachery and betrayal; for thirty wretched coins Judas sold his Lord to mockery and death.

When the dreadful deed was done, what could one do with the silver burning the palm and searing the conscience? Doubtless most of us, repentant, would have done as Judas did: we too would have sought to cancel the bargain, to return the money and reverse the verdict, to undo the horrendous transaction, to go back to the day before the darkness. But the march of events had passed the point of no return, and Judas could only pace in the darkness, the coins jingling their terrible rebuke. Lady Macbeth could wash her hands, as Pilate once had done, but still she roamed her castle crying: "What! will these hands ne'er be clean? . . . Here's the smell of blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand." Perhaps Judas washed the coins too, but their spots would not come off.

The second response would most naturally be that of nihilism: faced with a situation beyond control and a problem beyond solution, Judas hurled the coins to the floor of the temple and killed himself. Men have died for many reasons and in many moods: was ever a death more devoid of hope than that of this traitor? We have sympathy as we watch him die; for him there could have been only remorse.

And now the problem passes to the chief priests. The silver is still there on the floor. They had sought to evade responsibility: "See to it yourself," they had said to Judas. He saw to it, so far as he was concerned, and the priests had the burden shifted back to them.

Apparently the priests would have preferred to put the money in the treasury—a universal eccle-

siastical instinct. But it was blood money and could not be so used. So they had a consultation. I can imagine some of the uses proposed: distribution in alms, a lectureship on the protection of the faith, a scholarship for an aspiring rabbinical student. That money is tainted indeed which cannot be purified by association with such good causes.

But at least one of the priests had imagination and the others agreed to his proposal. Obviously they did not regret that Jesus was condemned: they were the real agents of his condemnation. But they were men of intelligence and sensitivity, and they knew that this particular money required some special treatment. So they devoted it to purchase of the potter's field, to bury strangers in! The potter's field—itsself an incomparable symbol both of life's lowest estate and of man's ineradicable dignity. Here the nameless, the ignored, the penniless, the strangers come at last—those without friends or family to mourn their passing, those to whom all sod is alien. But these too belong to the earth and must return to it; these too must be given burial, for their common clay has known the breath of life.

It may be that Judas himself bought the field. We are told in the first chapter of the Book of Acts that he did so and that he himself died on it, apparently from an accident rather than from remorse. In any event, the field came to be known as Akeldama, the Field of Blood, and it is commonly identified as the potter's field.

Whoever the purchaser may have been, the providence of God appears to have been at work here. For out of the blackest deeds he can bring good; out of stupidities, as Kierkegaard put it, God can bring the best. Out of treachery he brought compassion, out of crucifixion he brought redemption.

Is it not a marvelous irony that the price of betrayal of history's most important man should have been used to provide a last resting place for history's most insignificant men? Thirty pieces of silver—to what more appropriate use could they have been put

than the purchase of a potter's field? The money that sent Jesus to a cross went on to provide earth's last consolation for the strangers and the nameless ones. The betrayal of him who saved mankind led at last to concern for those most forgotten by mankind.

The sequence is ironic but the result is very fitting. Christ died for all men and not least for the least of men. In life he had special concern for the poor, the outcast, the widows and the strangers. He has been described as one who had no place to lay his head; but for Joseph of Arimathea he might have laid it at last in the potter's field. His rude cross was very like the rude crosses that have marked, since he hung there, the last rendezvous of those who lie in the unidentified graves of soldiers and of the poor who died without a name.

It is presumptuous to confine the saving work of Christ to any one group of humans. He died for all men. But in our contemporary world the potter's field has a new universality. Millions of Europe's Jews fell backward into mass graves while volleys roared or were reduced to irretrievable ashes in great ovens. The displaced persons of Europe and the Middle East and Korea exist in faceless anonymity and hasten toward the common earth. Many have gone to death these last years in the wastes of the sea and the fragmentation of the bomb and the vaporization of the atom, so that no man knows where they rest. The closing words of George Eliot's *Middlemarch* have for us a new relevance: "That things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been is half owing to the number who . . . rest in unvisited tombs."

Christ died for these too, and we are required to visit them. On a temporary shelter for D.P.s outside Munich in 1948 the following words were scrawled:

Our congregational shall be
The poor, the scorned,
The Outcasts of the whole world,
The enemies who strike us and hate us;
For these, not for ourselves,
We go searching out into the streets.
Gently and with sympathy we shall clasp their
hands,
And none shall remain forsaken,
And let there be but one law—
The love of Christ.

(Ernst Trasolt)

Thirty pieces of silver—the bribe was itself ransomed. The price of betrayal purchased the potter's field. The shadow of the cross fell on the field for strangers, and they were strangers no more. L.P.

EDITORIAL NOTES

The enquiry concerning the behavior of Col. Schwable raises profound questions which cannot be answered in terms of any accepted pattern. It is most fortunate that General Dean has helped us to understand the limits of human endurance under the bitterly cruel and ingenious pressures which modern totalitarian regimes know how to impose on both body and spirit. General Dean's utter honesty and fairness and his capacity to see that, given more severe treatment than he actually received, he might have done the very things charged against Col. Schwable are marks of rare nobility of soul. These completely ruthless and devilishly ingenious kinds of torture which are designed to break a man's body and spirit at the same time might prove to be too much for any one of us. There may be those who can take any amount of physical torture but when that is combined with forms of psychological manipulation which create mental and spiritual confusion so that, for the moment, people find themselves believing or half-believing the very thing that they are expected to say, who knows what he would finally do? How many months or years can one be sure that one would hold out?

To deal with behavior under these extreme and unprecedented conditions as though it could be judged by a military code of courage and honor, under conditions of warfare as hitherto known, is absurd. What is asked of the individual is not the courage of a soldier but the courage of a lonely martyr, of a lonely martyr who is subjected to a combination of pressures which few of the great martyrs of history had to face. In any case, the facing of them would require spiritual gifts which no civil or military law can require any man to possess. The Dutch judge, who was President of the Court which tried the cases of Dutchmen who had fallen into the hands of Nazis and had given information to the enemy, has written in a letter to *The New York Times* that he and his colleagues on the bench reached the conclusion that "no man can possibly vouch for it that under no circumstances will he 'confess', 'cooperate', or 'betray' his country. No man who has not himself gone through the hell which Communists and Nazis have been so able to organize has any right to judge the conduct of a man who did." Human courts cannot fairly go beyond that. There are spiritual resources for martyrdom which in some cases enable a person to endure under conditions far worse and for a longer time than seems possible for any man, but these are gifts

of grace which enable no one who possesses them to condemn others who lack them.

* * *

It is surprising that so little is said about the recent events in Travancore. This is a province in South India where in recent elections the Congress party was defeated by a coalition of communists and socialists. One report indicated that the communists and the socialists would form a coalition government. That has since been denied and, at the moment, the socialists who are weaker than either the communists or the Congress party seem to be forming a government by themselves. But the situation is very precarious. If the socialist minority cannot hold out it would be natural to expect a coal-

ition government. In such coalition governments, communists almost always outmaneuver the socialists. This pattern of winning control in provinces, one by one, may prove to be the way in which communism takes over South-East Asia without necessarily firing a shot. We may hope that this will not be so and it is certainly not inevitable. If things do happen in this way we may find that it would have been far better strategy to have done everything to support Nehru who is wholly anti-communist in India, and indeed the greatest moral obstacle to communism there, even though he may represent a confused neutralism in foreign policy. If things do happen in this way, not even the army of Pakistan supported by us can save the situation! Nor will "massive retaliation" be relevant! J.C.B.

Morality and the Cross

LANGDON B. GILKEY

ONE of the most telling arguments for the validity and relevance of religion is its claim that religious faith can alone provide a lasting and creative basis for morality. This claim is certainly valid; but, if taken alone, it is apt to be very misleading about the true depths of the life of religion, and so something much more must be said.

By morality in this discussion we shall mean the accepted patterns of behaviour in terms of which an individual can relate himself cooperatively to the society in which he lives. Considered psychologically it can, therefore, be understood as the adjustment of the ego *creatively* to his social environment; and considered morally or ethically, it can be understood as the adjustment of the individual's life to the moral ideals and codes of his society. Morality in other words is the cooperative adjustment of the individual and his social environment. Now it would be very misleading indeed to conclude that religion relates itself to morality so defined by merely providing a cosmic basis without and a cosmic fuel within so that this morality can function smoothly and well—nor does religion merely provide a cosmic cushion when its moral adjustment breaks down. Rather in a very real sense religion, and especially the Christian religion, is from one perspective radically antithetical to morality as here understood. Religion is as much the judge of our highest morality of the adjustment of the individual to his society as it is its final support.

The eternal symbol for this antithesis between morality and the Christian faith is the event with which that faith began: the crucifixion of our Lord. And its center is this statement in Mark's gospel:

*"and with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left"—or as one old manuscript illuminatingly adds: "and he was reckoned with the transgressors."** Our Lord died between two thieves; he died as a criminal among criminals, a threat to the political order and to the highest moral and religious code of his time. His relation to his own moral and social environment was the absolutely negative relation of the legally convicted man of the electric chair. It was natural, therefore, that the early Christian community was also a society of outcasts, of strangers to society: their Lord an outlaw and their symbol the hangman's noose.

In the picture, therefore, of a founder dead between two thieves the antithesis between the Christian religion and "morality" is etched with burning clarity—and we Christians must never lose sight of this strange, unearthly beginning. For the judgment and capital punishment of our Lord were not carried out by some surge of social madness or by an evil tyranny. The judgment rather represented the findings and the will of the two greatest social and moral achievements of the ancient Hellenic world: the Roman government and law, and the Jewish moral and religious code. It was civilization in its truest sense that found our Lord an "outlaw," a criminal among criminals.

It is well to ponder seriously this origin of our faith. In the first place it is instructive for those of us who are tempted to reduce the human problem to the level of the psychological adjustment of the individual to society to realize that a morality of ad-

* Cf. Mark 15: 6-32.

justment must consistently condemn both our Lord and the two criminals; and, what is more, such a morality can find no intelligible basis for distinguishing morally between them. It is, moreover, well for us all to recollect through this strange origin how the depths of our Christian religion transcend the ordinary canons of what is moral and what is rational. Religion is never simply rational and moral; it trembles on the abyss of what may appear to be less than the true and the good in order to reach beyond our human truth and our human goodness. Thus the classical observer and the Jewish moralist alike saw our Lord as a criminal imposter, a "crucified sophist," as Lucian of Samosata observed. And they regarded his early community as an irrational, anti-social force inimical to reason and morality alike. Strangely indeed is the mysterious love of God related to what we humans hold to be the true and the good.

Nor can we escape the implications of this by saying that our society is higher, wiser and nobler than that of the Roman law and the Jewish religion. We Protestants are inclined to smile a bit complacently when we read in *The Brothers Karamazov* that when Christ reappeared to the Grand Inquisitor, that Catholic prelate had reluctantly to confess that the crucifixion must take place again in order that the religion of the Church be maintained. But can we honestly foresee any other result if our Lord were to appear and speak his burning words of judgment and of love in the midst of the Stock Exchange, in a meeting of the AMA devoted to the problem of public health and its extension, at a loyalty hearing in Norwalk or in Washington—or in the bitter and petty wrangles and jealousies of a clergyman's convention? I do not wish to demean our faith by pretending to predict the words and actions of our Lord. But I shudder at the recurrent thought that in our age he would escape the Cross—only because no one of us would give him a serious hearing.

The stark antithesis of a Lord judged "guilty" by our contemporary standards thus remains. We cannot escape it, but only ask ourselves in wonder: What does it mean? The judgment on our Lord by society means first of all the strangest possible assertion of the relativity of our morality, of those systems of adjustment between individuals and society which are phrased as moral codes. The fact that these systems condemn Jesus, the fact that when the divine love appears they literally cannot bear its presence, is in turn the most striking condemnation of them. And the reason is that these systems of approved behaviour in a society always reflect in part an undercurrent of self-concern, and especially the interests and concerns of the dominant groups in that society. They channel actions and thus make peace and order possible—but always the kind of

peace and order desired by the dominant groups.

For example, in late feudal times the definition of legal and moral justice favored the large land-owning classes; the peasants, therefore, in order to achieve more justice, had to defy the "order" and "peace" of society and become the rebels and moral outcasts of the sixteenth century revolts. Again in early industrial society the law favored the managerial classes; and as a consequence the early unionists found themselves pitted against law and order alike in order to secure a larger measure of fair practices in employment. In each case what was "moral" and "just" in society reflected not only a moral ideal but also a deep struggle for power and the deep self-concern on the part of dominant groups in society to protect themselves and their interests. And in our own time the moral ideal of "peace" has had a similarly ambiguous history. Before the war the status quo favored the powerful democratic and commercial nations who had control of most of the available markets of the world, and such was their commercial preponderance that only outright military aggression could break their favorable balance of economic power. In this situation we prided ourselves on being among the "peace-loving nations." Since the war, however, our new enemies have developed an insidious technique of non-military aggression which must be countered, in part at least, by military strength and military threats. And so in the present day we find ourselves a little uncertain whether we approve of "peace" or not—for as an effective weapon of a ruthless communist tyranny against our own security, "peace" has ceased to function for many of us as an ideal which favors our side in this battle for power. Thus the moral ideals and systems of behaviour of human society reflect in part the deep struggles for power therein; and thus the justice of a society is always less than justice, its goodness and peace always less than a true goodness and a true peace.

For this reason, therefore, the Christian faith can never be used simply to defend a culture and its moral ideals—for those ideals and that culture are always less pure and true than they seem to those who stand within that culture and are protected by it. Christianity can never be identified with a particular cause lest it lose its intrinsic and essential purity, lest it be untrue to its Lord who refused to identify himself with the mores of his time—and so died on the cross. For such an identification means that Christianity ceases to be the Word of God to all men and becomes merely the word of some men against their enemies. Because the Cross reveals that the divine love comes into radical conflict with the moral and social patterns of society, it is the strongest possible affirmation of the relativity of human moral systems.

Secondly, in the Cross is portrayed with infinite clarity the abiding truth that "adjustment" can never be the final goal for any individual man. The human death of Jesus reveals that the true dimension of the human spirit reaches beyond its social context with its struggles for power and its relative morals. For this context may force that individual spirit to choose between its own integrity and the delusive peace of adjustment. In this death of our Lord we see that there may be times when the true man must stand against his society, and suffer thereby the painful charge of "immorality" and "betrayal" rather than be untrue to himself. For if his society has itself been overcome by evil, then he can only adjust at the peril of losing himself.

Thus just as American Christianity cannot claim to be defending Christ in defending its own relative social mores, so each individual American Christian must continually remember that in all human life there is this final tragic possibility: namely that the integrity and faith of the individual may necessitate that that individual stand alone against his own society if the evil that is present in any society becomes predominant. Just this peril faces us today in America, for in Washington the evil forces of untruth, favoritism and persecution stalk the citadels of our national power and grow frighteningly in influence each passing day. In this situation the human figure of our Lord upon a cross is the continual reminder to each of us that to "adjust" and to "adjust again" is to kill the inward integrity of the human spirit; that to tarnish that spirit by a final adjustment to the smothering pressure of social acceptance is to lose something more precious than life itself. The depths of the individual conscience of each Christian demand that he reject and fight the evil that is in our society. And at times this demand may mean, as it did for our Lord, the final sacrifice of martyrdom.

The Cross, then, reveals the sins of society and the purity of the individual who rejects them and so is rejected in turn by his environment. But does it not reveal something more? Does not the spotlight of its judgment turn slowly from the evils of society beyond us and fix its bright light upon ourselves as individuals? In this new focus, does not the figure of Jesus recede and rise beyond us? Do we not find that we can no longer identify ourselves with him in his martyrdom, but rather with another figure at a safe distance from the suffering, with Peter who fled in fear—and wept in bitter remorse? For whenever we refuse to speak out against social evil because it is unorthodox to do so, whenever we participate in the discrimination against minority peoples, whenever we defend ourselves to the last desperate, bitter breath against just criticism, then we are Peter and are ourselves in grave need of

salvation. Thus just as the image of the Kingdom far transcends and so judges our social morality, so the image of our Lord far transcends and so judges our own individual courage and integrity. And no more than Peter can we enter the Kingdom by our own strength and virtue.

In the light of the Cross, therefore, the moral problem is seen to be much deeper than "morality," than the problem of the adjustment of the individual to his social context however filled it may be with ideals. For in the end it is the problem of purgation and of cleansing—a cleansing in which both the individual and society must be purged from beyond themselves and reborn, remade into a new image. The endless wheel of adjustment has neither life nor hope; it has no moral creativity. The patterns may change and the cultures come and go, but finally the sinful self in relation to a sinful culture provides no grounds for the genuine renewal of life.

The Cross, therefore, is more than the revelation of the relativity of culture and the heroic stature of the lonely martyr. It is even more the revelation of the saving grace of God which can purge and transform men. Only thus is it a symbol of hope as well as of tragedy. For only in God is there a resource of judgment and of love and power from beyond both ourselves and our society which can cleanse us all. And so because in the Cross the divine judgment purges us of our sin and the divine love draws us beyond ourselves, the Cross is the symbol of the Christian hope. Its judgment is so blinding because here the depth of sin and of self-seeking is so startlingly revealed: as we see our social ways accuse our Lord and our own weak, individual hearts flee in fear, we know we are judged as by God Himself. With a judgment which challenges both our social and our individual self-esteem, the Cross meets us as a Word which comes from beyond all those relative estimates by means of which we justify ourselves, and so a Word which has its origin in God Himself.

But through the divine judgment shines the divine love—and this is the basis of our hope. For the wonder of the Cross is that these two means of the divine purgation come to us together and with the highest intensity. We cannot know the weight of the judgment unless we know that it is the divine love which we here crucify. And we cannot recognize the depth of the love that is there unless we know as well that the suffering of that love is for our sin and so is an intense judgment against that sin. Thus in the midst of the thundering judgment when God's love is slain by us, there is revealed the healing word that God's love has suffered for us, suffered that we may know the depth of His love and His acceptance of us though we sin. And in that knowledge our trust in God is born; we are cleansed and

given a new center in the life of God's love. For if even our betrayal has not separated us from this love, how can anything at all prevent the power and the meaning of God from redeeming our lives?

When the Christian looks at the Cross, therefore, he knows true sorrow and true repentance, but even truer hope and joy. For here he sees his life reborn in the love of God; he is given here a center of acceptance and of meaning beyond himself and his society. He is, therefore, freed from the endless shuttling between a petty, finite ego and the crushing

authority of a society wracked with pride, injustice and self-seeking. His life is given a center in God's love beyond the small and stifling demands of either ego or society, and he is recreated to a life of courage and of love which purges and transforms both his own life and that around him. This is not "morality"—it is the life of faith, the life of religion, the life lived in fellowship with God. But it is creative of the only true moral health within and the only lasting social progress without.

CHURCH NEWS AND NOTES

Dibelius Reports Renewal Of Anti-Religious Pressure

(RNS) Berlin — Anti-religious pressure again has become "clearly discernible" in Communist-controlled East Germany, Bishop Otto Dibelius charged here. The Berlin prelate, head of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKID), declared that "school children have been put under pressure, clergymen and religious services are under government supervision and difficulties have arisen in the issuance of permits for religious meetings planned to be held in the Soviet Zone."

Dr. Dibelius spoke at EKID's All-German Synod. He pointed out that it was still uncertain whether the 1954 rally of the German Evangelical Church Day (DEKT) movement could be held in Leipzig as planned. In January, East German Premier Otto Grotewohl raised objections to the scheduled congress. Pressed by Church officials, his office now has announced willingness to negotiate on the subject. Persecution of the Church in East Germany reached its height in the spring of 1953. In June the regime suddenly called off its campaign. Imprisoned clergymen were released, supervision of church services was relaxed and other measures taken to ease pressure against the Church.

But Bishop Dibelius told the Synod that new pressures began to develop around the end of the year. He said the Church in East Germany was financially distressed because State grants had been canceled and the regime had hindered money-raising efforts. The Church, however, is even more distressed by the fact that there is no rule of law in the Soviet Zone, "at least not in the sense we Christians understand justice and rule of law," the bishop added. He declared it was impossible for the Church to accept as right what was useful to the State or a group. The Church would not refrain from stating that the State, too, was subject to the law and not above it, the bishop said.

Bishop Dibelius described Church-State relations in West Germany as "on the whole friendly and positive." But he criticized municipal and other levels of government for scheduling public events during worship hours on Sundays.

Propose National Secretariat For Worker Missions

(RNS) Paris — Formation of a national secretariat for worker missions and establishment of an episcopal

commission to deal with such problems were proposed by priest-workers at a recent meeting with the French hierarchy. Represented at the meeting were priest-workers who had obeyed the hierarchy's instructions that they must quit their full-time secular jobs and all temporal activities by March 1.

The question of dissident worker-priests is said to have come up at the meeting. The priests present reportedly gave it as their opinion that many would probably obey the Church's ruling as soon as their contracts with employers expire.

Of the more than 100 worker-priests about 30 are believed to have refused to comply with the bishops' ruling. All the Dominicans, Jesuits and Franciscans engaged in the apostolate have returned to their communities.

Meanwhile, Father Jean Beslay, director of Vatican Radio broadcasts to France, referred to the priest-worker problem in a program directed to this country. He said that "the Pope is fully aware of the preoccupation of the French clergy in whom he has entire confidence. He follows attentively the reactions of the priests of the Worker Mission and much of the news that has reached him has touched his heart." Father Beslay urged French Catholics to understand the motives which induced the Pope to make a decision in regard to the priest-worker movement.

"In this drama, so painful to everyone, have we reflected enough," he asked, "on the fact that it was first born in the Pope's conscience? Have we thought of the terrible problem of conscience which the Sovereign Pontiff had to resolve when he believed that the sacerdotcy of Christ, of which he is the guardian, was being threatened in its purity?"

Correspondence

Dear Sirs:

I certainly appreciate *Christianity and Crisis*. It provides a depth and breadth sorely needed in our time of shallowness and narrowness.

I want to comment on F. Ernest Johnson's observations in a recent issue. His most important paragraph is the one in which he discusses the errors of the liberals. He speaks of them as "guardians of democratic process" but whose guardianship is in danger of collapse because of their error—i.e.—assuming that human beings in our society will tend to be rational if their problems are stated rationally, or rather "correctly."

Is it really true that the liberals are making such an assertion? I thought they were saying something else: that no problem can be stated as though it stood alone or apart from the civilized beings caught up in its dilemma. The problem isn't separate from the persons. This is what I see Seward Hiltner saying in his recent response to Dr. Niebuhr. Thus it isn't a matter of "correctness" or of simple "rationality." The thing we ought to pay attention to is the relationship or, to use a word Johnson himself employs in describing the task of the liberals, the *process* which binds the confused person to his shaky circumstance. Certainly, what Johnson says is important and a needed criticism of a substantive liberalism. I'd like to see him take the discussion further, though, and deal with the intermingling of "persons" with "problems." It's in that ebb and flow that the juice really squirts. I hope he does it; and when he does, I'll read it with rapt attention.

In the meanwhile, thanks for an excellent publication.

Carl E. Wennerstrom,
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Sir:

I was interested to read Prof. Niebuhr's comments on the recent Berlin Conference of foreign ministers. I share with him his typically realistic attitude regarding the failure of the diplomats to come up with anything more tangible that would lead to real peace. But I would like to share with you two questions which occurred to me as I read Mr. Niebuhr's article.

It seemed to me that Mr. Niebuhr's remarks in spirit too easily echoed what in reality the Big Four conference reflected, that is, the mere continuation of the power struggle between the East and West. I had hoped that Mr. Niebuhr would have gone on to suggest that in order for real progress toward peace to occur, one side or the other must be willing to renounce this struggle for world dominance and in a spirit of repentance, courageous love, and honesty work for a decent world. Perhaps this is not precisely the spirit Mr. Niebuhr wished to convey in his remarks.

My other question concerns the reference to Pastor Niemoeller's "illusions" regarding German unification. It seems to me that regardless of whatever ideas Pastor Niemoller may covet about the future of Germany, his desire for unification is quite justifiable. An increasing number of people are viewing such unification and neutralization of Germany as one of the necessary first steps toward genuine peace.

Yours truly,
Robert L. Cannon
San Gabriel, California

Dear Dr. Niebuhr:

I read the extracts from a letter on South Africa which you published in your issue of *Christianity and Crisis* of Nov. 2, 1953. Would you allow me, as an Afrikaners "liberal," a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church, and a teacher in theology, to make some comments. Let me explain at the outset, however, that I place the adjective "liberal" in inverted commas, because it does not mean in my case, a liberal in the

19th century sense, nor a theological liberal, but purely one who is not in principle conservative, and who endeavors to apply the truth of Christian freedom to all parts of life.

I do not like the extracts from that letter on South Africa. I do not like the tone of it, neither do I like the apparent self-righteousness with which a slur is cast on "Afrikanerdom." I could ask the writer many questions. I could ask him, how he understood "apartheid," and remind him that it is tentatively accepted by the large portion of the Dutch Ref. Church only in the form of total territorial separation, a concept which includes the idea of equality, and which was accepted by prominent liberals like Jan Hofmeyr and Dr. Hoernle as a genuine liberal policy? I could ask him, what alternative he proposed—integration in the "liberal" economic system of today which has robbed thousands upon thousands of Africans of the only background they knew, the tribal system, without putting anything in its place? I could ask him, in what manner did he endeavor to make a dent in "apartheid" at the conference in Pretoria in November between Church leaders, convened by the Dutch Ref. Church? I was present at that conference, and the delegates from the English-speaking churches were conspicuous for their almost complete theological inarticulateness on the question of the principles of race relations. The attack upon apartheid as an ideology, as a semi-religion, was almost entirely carried by members of the Dutch Ref. Church like Prof. Kleet, Dr. Ben Marais, and others (amongst whom I include myself). I could also ask your correspondent whether apartheid was encountered only among Afrikaners, not in English-speaking Natal or the Rhodesias? But this is trivial.

My principle aim in writing you this letter, is to acquaint you with some elements of the Afrikaans "liberal" outlook, and some of the reasons why we have so little in common with the individualistic type of liberalism which is the common English type in this country. First let me explain to you the position of my church. During the Anglo-Boer war, which was fought on account of the gold in Transvaal, the Dutch Ref. Church considered the cause of the Boer Republics to be just, and their struggle for freedom, a Christian struggle. Not one of the liberals in the country, not one of the English churches, raised a single voice of protest against the rape of the Republics, although even then they were greatly interested in the question of the treatment of non-Europeans. After the war, liberal politics in Britain gave the Republics their measure of self-government back. But the people were shattered psychologically, and economically destroyed by the scorched earth policy. The Dutch Ref. Church strove to rehabilitate them. Even after the depression of the thirties, about 300,000 Afrikaners out of a total of about 1¼ million were classed as "poor whites." Our Church built up a great organization to reestablish them. The liberals here did nothing, fought against any attempts to rehabilitate these people to such an extent that their voice was often indistinguishable from the voice of London imperialism. But still they were interested in the fate of the Africans. The one thing was close to them, appeared to be an attack on British

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supremacy in this country, the other thing remained theoretical, for they were not in economic touch with the Africans; the Afrikaners were, they had their England to return to, the Afrikaners had nowhere.

Today the matter is being brought closer home. Recently in the fashionable English-speaking Johannesburg suburb of Houghton, which has been largely associated with the liberal approach to African matters, the City Council suggested that a recreation field of African domestic servants in the vicinity be established. It was smothered immediately.

It is very difficult for us Afrikaners who work amongst and for the Africans, to see where liberalism

amongst these people is a matter of principle, or an abstract, optimistic and often irresponsible pastime. It is especially difficult to see clearly what the theological foundations are upon which many of their utterances are founded. That there are many sincere English-speaking Christians I know personally, and would never doubt or forget, but they are not so adamant about their own "liberalism" and not so superior toward the usually conservative Afrikaans people.

From an Afrikaans point of view, and from the point of view of Reformed theology (Dutch, Swiss and German), "liberalism" means an attempt to apply the principle of Christian freedom to life and to society. For many of us it was to some extent historically exemplified in the struggle of the Boer Republics against Imperialism. From this experience we wish to carry the idea of freedom to the African people. But this is not the liberalism of individualism, nor the absolutism of nationalism, but the careful and patient work of finding out what the freedom in Christ means in our society, also amongst the semi-heathen Africans in our cities. For us, the concept of freedom is closely coupled with responsibility, and we would ask, how can the African as he is today, be taught what political, economic and social responsibility means. We have, differing from individualist liberalism, great respect for the order and stability of the state. How can the Africans enter political life and simultaneously help ensure the order and stability of the State? There are many of us in the Dutch Ref. Church who believe that this is only possible when the Africans are totally separated in their own province or state, where they can start from the beginning together. Others amongst us do not quite believe that this will be the best, or that such a division of the country is at all possible. But these matters are being assiduously studied, and will become clear. Whatever our attitude to the present situation and our protests against the many injustices, we cannot sever the concept of freedom from that of responsibility in every respect, including the political and the economical. And this consideration we do not apply only to one section of the population or another, but to our whole society and all its component groups. We are facing symptoms of absolute nationalism, born from conservatism, and warning against them. But we are also not at one with many of the utterances of liberalism.

We in South Africa are as Christians today striving to discover the Biblical foundations for individual and social freedom and responsibility in the various spheres of personal and group relations, and the various fields of our daily life. Your writings have attracted considerable attention here, and we would have you know of our attitude to these matters.

With best greetings in Christ,

yours truly,

(Dr.) J. Alex. van Wyk, V.D.M.,
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Author in This Issue

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